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KILLING TWO BIRDS WITH A STONE: MERGING READING AND WRITING ACTIVITIES THROUGH BLACKOUT POETRY

by

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Abstract:

This study investigates students' perceptions of writing online blackout poetry in an elective course called Children's Literature. A descriptive case study is purposively used to explore their perceptions of the advantages of writing online blackout poetry on their reading and writing skills and the obstacles in doing the activity. Fifty-one students of children's literature writing blackout poetries are the research participants. Close-ended and open-ended questionnaires were used for the data collection. Meanwhile, the data were analyzed thematically using the framework of Braun and Clarke (2006). The findings show that students have a positive perception of writing blackout poetry. They believe that the activity is challenging and promotes their creativity. Furthermore, it is regarded as a media that merges reading and writing activities. However, it is found that blackout poetry has limited word expression. Despite its weaknesses, this study implies that blackout poetry can promote creativity and reading and writing activities in the EFL context.

Keywords: Literature in ELT, Online Blackout Poetry, Reading, Writing

Abstrak:

Studi ini menyelidiki persepsi siswa tentang menulis puisi pemadaman online dalam mata kuliah pilihan yang disebut Sastra Anak. Studi kasus deskriptif secara purposif digunakan untuk mengeksplorasi persepsi mereka tentang keuntungan menulis puisi pemadaman online pada keterampilan membaca dan menulis mereka dan hambatan dalam melakukan kegiatan tersebut. Lima puluh satu siswa sastra anak-anak menulis puisi blackout adalah peserta penelitian. Kuesioner tertutup dan terbuka digunakan untuk pengumpulan data. Sedangkan data dianalisis secara tematis menggunakan kerangka Braun dan Clarke (2006). Temuan menunjukkan bahwa siswa memiliki persepsi positif dalam menulis puisi blackout. Mereka percaya bahwa kegiatan ini menantang dan mempromosikan kreativitas mereka. Selain itu, dianggap sebagai media yang menggabungkan kegiatan membaca dan menulis. Namun, ditemukan bahwa puisi blackout memiliki ekspresi kata yang terbatas. Studi ini menyiratkan bahwa puisi blackout dapat meningkatkan kreativitas dan kegiatan membaca dan menulis dalam konteks EFL meskipun kelemahannya.

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Kata kunci: Sastra di ELT, Puisi blackout online, membaca, menulis

INTRODUCTION

It has been widely known that creativity is one of the essential skills that should be mastered for 21st-century education. Creativity and problem-solving are crucial for a better future (Azzam, 2009; Newton & Newton, 2014). In addition, in higher education, students must master four skills of 4C, namely collaborative, critical, creative, and communicative (Auraningrum et al., 2022). Thus, promoting activities in the classroom that build creativity is considered needed.

Concerning teaching and learning activities, creativity in writing can be implemented in various ways involving personal experiences, social engagements, and social contextualization (Widodo et al., 2016). Since it engages personal experience, our curriculum should involve students' opinions, voices, and experiences. Teaching and learning language context can be done in various ways through writing specific genres such as recount text, argumentative text, etc. In addition, students can also deliver their voices and experience through poetry.

Writing poetry is considered one of the activities to build creativity. Hanauer (2012) argues that language play considers creativity in writing. Students can write and create words and play with them using their imagination, ideas, and creativity (Nopikasari et al., 2018). In addition, Widodo et al. (Widodo et al., 2016) emphasize that poetry as creative writing is a self-expressive and creative way for learners of a second or additional language to communicate multi-semiotic (different linguistic and non-linguistic resources) meanings. Furthermore, Iida (2016) argues that expressing personal experience encourages L2 writers to be more reflective and engaged and "to come to know who they are, their beliefs, and why this is so. In a nutshell, poetry in L2 and EFL learning has been widely recognized as a tool of creative writing to express self-experience and self-reflection.

However, the appropriate media, such as Information and Communication Technology (ICT, hereafter), is needed to create a successful writing activity in this digital era. Previous research on successful writing activity through ICT, such as Fisher (2017) on the usefulness of Padlet, Anita (2016) and Abdullah et al. (2020) on motivating students to write narrative

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text through *Storybird*, Nova (2018) on evaluating writing task with *Grammarly* and Seyyedrezaei et al. (2021) on the outperformed students writing tasks through *Etherpad*. Those studies indicate that using appropriate media will result in positive outcomes.

Concerning the previous studies, there is an urgency to use technology in teaching and writing poetry. Many studies done in writing have focused on literature and the poetic aspect. There is little attention to researching poetry using ICT (Widodo et al., 2016). Considering the gap, this study introduces online blackout poetry as one of the tools for writing poetry.

Blackout poetry is illustrated as "a wood carving where the excess wood is removed to reveal the object hidden inside" (Ladenheim, 2014). Furthermore, she also states two advantages of writing blackout poetry: it is a creative way to facilitate students' engagement and enhance what they take away from the readings. In addition, it also can enhance students' engagement with the text. To make blackout poetry, students not only learn how to write but also how to read since writing blackout poetry deals with the text that has been read previously. Therefore, this study investigates students' perception and creativity in writing online blackout poetry. According to Miller (2017), "Blackout poetry refers to any poem in which the author covers a majority of a source text in favor of leaving a handful of words exposed to form a poem."

Moreover, Morales-Rodas et al. (2021) argue that blackout poetry is created by covering sections of unneeded text, newspapers, magazines, and old books with a permanent marker, decorations, paint, collages, crayons, pens or pencils, or other materials to obscure the text to leave just a few words legible and readable to form a new version. Generally, it can be stated that blackout poetry is a rewriting product of a written text. The way to make it is to color black the unneeded words using a pen, crayon, or marker so that the rest of the word (chosen to be not black) will be the poetry. Classically, a paper-based written text is usually used for blackout poetry. The figure below is an example of blackout poetry using paper-based media.

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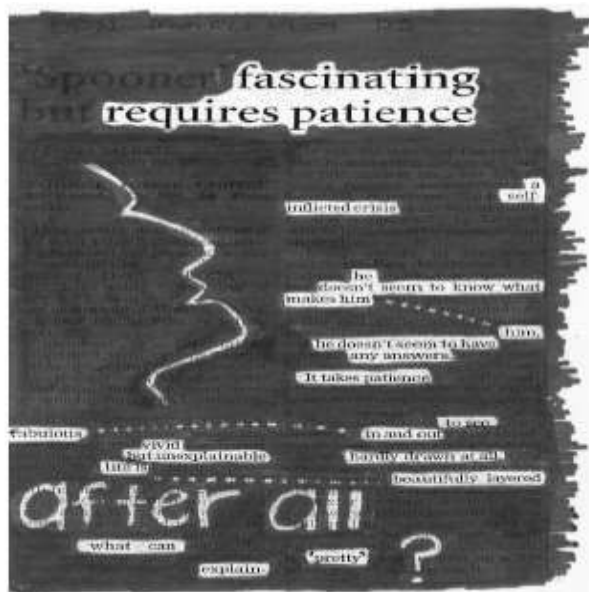


Figure 1. Example of classic blackout poetry

However, since the development of ICT, writing blackout poetry can also be done online. The text is needed in any paperless format such as Word, PDF, Mobi, or Epub; even it can be a copy-paste from a web page. One consideration is that the text should be read before turning it into blackout poetry since, in making the poetry, the writer must know all the meanings of the words from the text.

Thus, students can create blackout poetry classically using paper-based media or digitally using the blackout poetry maker. However, the limitation of this study is that the focus will be on students' experience of writing them digitally. Therefore, this research tries to investigate a single question: **"What are the students' perceptions of writing online blackout poetry?"**

METHOD

Design

This study used a descriptive case study since it aims to investigate a single phenomenon that occurs in a context. Yin (2018) claims that a case study investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not evident and when multiple sources of evidence are used. This method should investigate the phenomenon because of the uniqueness of writing

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blackout poetry, where the students created the poetry from their reading source in children's literature.

Participant

Fifty-one students taking creative writing courses participated in this study. Before starting the research, all students are given the consent form as an agreement to their participation. The considerations of their enrolment in this project are as follows: (1) All students were taught how to create blackout poetry manually or digitally in the second class meeting. (2) They created the poetry in the third and fourth meetings while completing their reading log. Also, they uploaded their blackout poetry on the Google Classroom Platform or their social media (Instagram or Facebook). During the following weeks, the students commented on each other's poetry or gave complimentary advice. (3) At the fifth meeting, they completed the questionnaire about their perception and experience of writing blackout poetry in the Google Form.

Data collecting technique

In conducting the study, this research employed a questionnaire of open and close-ended questions. One close-ended questionnaire asks about their feelings about writing online blackout poetry. The remaining five aspects were questioned: their perception of the writing process, difficulties, weaknesses, and opportunities for online blackout poetry in improving writing and reading skills. Students were questioned in Bahasa Indonesia to give no boundaries in expressing their opinions in their mother tongue.

Data analysis technique

The first question was described through percentage, while the rest of the questions were analyzed using the thematic analysis of Clarke et al. (2015) with the following steps: (1) Familiarizing the data where reading, rereading, and transcribing the data is done to comprehend the data thoroughly, (2) Finding the initial code by highlighting the critical information related to the study, such as the code implied their perception, challenges, or reading and writing skill's improvement, (3) Searching for the theme based on the potential codes, (4) Rearrange the theme by selecting the most potential and representative ones, and (5) Reporting the finding in the form of description. Data presentation and citation in both in-

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text and reference lists adopt automatic offline citation with the aid of Mendeley Desktop (Turmudi, 2020). Thus, the whole process employed some application to secure the validity of citations and list of references.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The study's findings are divided into two parts: the first answers the close-ended questionnaires, and the second is the result of the thematic analysis. The findings show three emerging themes. Firstly, online blackout poetry is a challenging writing activity that promotes creativity. Secondly, it is used as a medium of reading and writing exposure. Meanwhile, the third theme relates to the weakness of writing online blackout poetry, dealing with the limitation of words to express in the poetry.

Student's feelings towards writing online poetry

Students react variously, showing their feelings toward writing online blackout poetry. The pie chart below shows that half of the students think this activity is interesting, while almost a quarter think it is challenging. Of the rest of the students, 10% state that the activity is attractive, and 9% think that the activity is tedious.

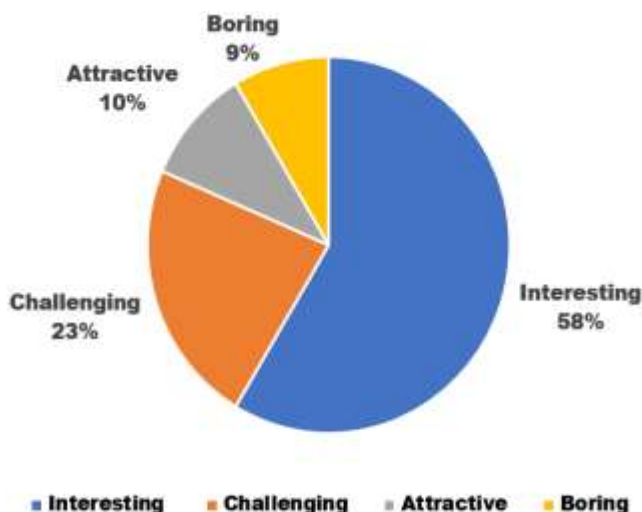


Figure 2. Chart of students' feelings towards writing online blackout poetry

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Challenging writing activity that promotes creativity

Creating a challenging activity in the classroom is not easy, especially regarding literature. However, the result shows that writing blackout poetry was challenging. It is also found that this activity is challenging and promotes their creativity.

Based on the result of the questionnaire, the activity is challenging for various reasons. Writing coherency becomes the most challenging thing students feel during the writing process. It needs the skill of understanding each word created until it becomes a whole unit of writing. The data is shown below;

Excerpt 1

We must think that our writing arrangement is coherent despite not being from the same sentences. (Participant 45)
I feel challenged to choose the appropriate word to become meaningful poetry. (Participant 21)
I tried to find the right and coherent word in writing blackout poetry. (Participant 12)

The data shows that students find it challenging to find the right words to have meaningful ones since they need to choose carefully the word that is available from the text. In a nutshell, coherency is considered essential to create poetry that has meaning.

Another reason writing blackout poetry is challenging is the effort in selecting poetic words. As one of the literature products, poetry has been seen as an aesthetic product of writing. It makes it difficult for the students to find the appropriate word that needs aesthetics. The excerpt is shown as follows;

Excerpt 2

Writing blackout poetry is interesting and can train my writing skills and help me become more poetic. It is also challenging because we must mix and match the words to be melodious. (Participant 10)
It is challenging because I must explore the words to make them beautiful. (Participant 6)
Writing blackout poetry is challenging because it sharpens our creativity since we use the available words from the text. For example, I want to create poetry with rhythm, but it is hard because the words I want are not available in the text. (Participant 50)

As seen from the excerpt, the need to create poetic words has been growing among the students. Having to mix and match the words, exploring all the words in the text, and even changing the text to create beautiful poetry is what the students need to fulfil their goals in writing aesthetic blackout poetry. Therefore, their consideration is not only on meaning but also on aesthetics.

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The creativity of the students is shown in both excerpts. Firstly, it is shown by students' effort in writing coherent writing. Secondly, it is shown by selecting and reselecting text and words to make poetic blackout poetry. Both data support the term language play as a sign of creativity in the linguistic area. Therefore, writing blackout poetry challenges the students and promotes their creativity through language play.

A Media of reading and writing exposure

The reading process is a pre-requisite activity that the students must fulfill before writing blackout poetry. Whether using skimming skills or scanning skills, knowing the meaning of each word is a basic need to create poetry. The data shows that students agree that writing activities give writing and reading exposure.

Excerpt 3

Of course, we do both (reading and writing). Before writing blackout poetry, we need to read. Therefore, our reading skill is practiced. (Participant 3)

In my opinion, writing blackout poetry practices our reading comprehension because we are not perfunctory in choosing the words we want. We need to consider the meaning. Therefore, our reading comprehension is also practiced. (Participant 23)

Before writing, of course, we need to do a speed reading and find the words. After the poetry has been written, we also have to read to ensure our writing is comprehensible. (Participant 14)

The data shows that students experience both language skills, reading and writing. The three participants admit that they practice reading comprehension because they need to understand the words before creating poetry. Besides, they also need to know each word's meaning from the text to create the poetry finally. Even participants 23 and 14 emphasized that they do a speed reading in the first place before doing reading for comprehension. Thus, it indicates that students get both reading and writing exposure.

In addition, it is mentioned that specific skills were trained while writing blackout poetry. Some students agree to use the scanning technique; others even use skimming and scanning to understand the text. The excerpt is shown below;

Excerpt 4

In writing blackout poetry, we are asked to read the text that will be the source. It also can train us to practice scanning skills in reading to select the words needed to create blackout poetry. (Participant 35)

For me, blackout poetry practices my reading skills to find appropriate words in a book with long pages. Reading skills such as skimming or scanning can also be practiced unconsciously. (Participant 27)

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This excerpt emphasized the reading technique used for a reading comprehension activity. Participant 35 uses scanning to ease her selection of the words. Meanwhile, Participant 27 shows that reading a long passage needs scanning and skimming skills. Even though not all pages can be inserted on the blackout poetry maker, choosing the right pages needs a skill, too. Therefore, both skimming and scanning are needed firstly to select the pages and secondly to select the words.

Limitation in word expression

Two previous themes show that writing blackout poetry is a positive activity to build creativity and practice reading and writing. However, the weaknesses of blackout poetry are also found. It relates to the issue of freedom of expression. Students had difficulties expressing the idea since blackout poetry is a reused word from a particular text. The proofs are as follows;

Excerpt 5

The words are usually limited and not as general as particular poetry. (Participant 2)
It is not as free as writing poetry generally. It should be adjusted to the provided words. (Participant 47)
I can write whatever I want or like when I write free verse poetry. However, when writing blackout poetry, there is a limitation in writing the words; sometimes, I have difficulty searching it from the text. (Participant 30)

The word choice makes blackout poetry different from other kinds of poetry. The words provided by the text are the only words used for poetry. There is a limitation in expressing and using words. As is shown by the excerpt, the students agree that the weakness of writing blackout poetry is word limitation, which unconsciously affects their freedom of expression. Even Participant 38 states, "Probably, our imagination is hindered and not fully free." It can be seen that since they use the words available in the text, claiming that their freedom of expression has been limited is not thoroughly wrong. In a nutshell, limited words have hindered their imagination.

Discussion

Students have positive perceptions of writing blackout poetry. The indicators shown in the findings prove that Most students feel the activity is challenging and exciting. However, most theories state that writing is demanding and the most challenging skill (Richards &

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Renandya, 2002). Writing poetry is seen as challenging positively. This is in line with Sulastri and Pujasari (2019), who state that writing poetry challenges students to arrange the word like a poet creatively.

Not only is it challenging, but writing blackout poetry promotes creativity. Students are engaged in creating the theme, poetic language, and meaning, which indeed needs creativity. Even though all humans are programmed, called creativity acquisition devices or CAD (Widodo et al., 2016), a trigger must be activated. Therefore, this activity promotes their creativity, especially from a linguistic perspective. This is in line with Tin et al. (2010) and Sulastri (2018), stating that creativity from a linguistic perspective can be seen in how the students play with the language. In addition, carrying out a written production implies having linguistic knowledge and competencies alongside significant cognitive (Morales-Rodas et al., 2021).

Regarding language skills, there is no doubt that this activity involves students in two activities: reading and writing. Like killing two birds with one stone, the students practice reading skills and writing. Writing blackout poetry is taking texts apart in search of meaning and creating texts in search of understanding (Ladenheim, 2014). The data shows that the students believe that they practice both activities when writing blackout poetry. Scanning techniques are usually used in the reading activity since the students need to find the specific words that could be the line of the poetry. By practicing it often, it is believed that their reading skill will also improve since skimming has been regarded as influential in improving reading skills (Aritonang et al., 2018)

Meanwhile, most students use their creativity and imagination in writing activities to create poetic and meaningful words. Creativity in writing poetry can be shown in how they play the language semantically or phonologically, such as using the same rhyme for the end of the line or creating beautiful patterns (Sulastri et al., 2022). In conclusion, creativity in writing can be promoted by this activity.

Even though writing poetry has been seen positively, the data shows that blackout poetry has weaknesses concerning word limitation. The students find it challenging to use their imagination fully due to the limited words the text provides. Although it hinders their

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imagination, blackout poetry can enhance students' reading and writing skills through many exercises (Moralez-Rodas, 2021).

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

Conclusion

Like killing two birds with one stone, writing blackout poetry is merging reading and writing activities at the same time. It allows students to use skimming, scanning techniques, and language play in writing.

Implication

This study implies that pedagogically, writing a blackout poetry potentially promotes student's creativity in writing, such as the ability to play with language. In addition, as the 21st-century skills that the students must learn, writing blackout poetry has a chance to deal with creativity as the core of creating blackout poetry. Expressing personal experience in the form of writing proves that blackout poetry is one of the activities that can promote students' creativity. In a nutshell, activities can be beneficial to promote students' reading and writing skills.

Limitation

However, since this study involved many participants, it draws a limitation on a deep understanding of the context. Participants were asked in written form with limited words to express. Therefore, this study suggests a deeper understanding of the context by interviewing the students' strategies to face the challenges of writing blackout poetry.

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